
BACKGROUND

COMMUNITY HISTORY

Early maps of the Pueblo lands around the original town (Old Town) location show the San Diego River emptying from Mission Valley into the San Diego Bay over land which now comprises the Midway area. In the mid-1800s, George Derby, army land surveyor, engineered the construction of a dike which diverted the course of the river into the channel of what is now known as the mouth of the San Diego River. The dike was later flooded and had to be rebuilt again around 1870.

In 1850, approximately 687 acres of land in the Middletown area (including Pacific Highway), located between the Old Town site and New Town (Centre City), was conveyed by Joshua Bean, the City's first mayor, to a group of ten early pioneers. The group ambitiously acquired and subdivided the land in an attempt to compete with New Town. The names of some of the original ten investors are remembered in the existing street name system along the Pacific Highway, which include: Emory, Sutherland, Noell, Estudillo, Wright, Banini, Coutts and Witherby.

In the early 1900s, the central Midway area was generally known as Dutch Flats, presumably because of the preponderance of standing water. In the early 1920s, the Marine Advanced Expeditionary Base (Marine Corps Recruit Depot) was built along Barnett Avenue, which was then the main thoroughfare from the New Town area (Centre City) to the burgeoning Point Loma community. Historic photos of the central Midway area show virtually no development throughout the 1920s, with only sand, salt flats and a few isolated structures. During the same period, an electric railway system and some industrial, commercial and residential uses were evident along Pacific Highway.

By the 1930s, a variety of commercial, industrial and some more residential development had occurred in the Pacific Highway area, and by the 1940s the Midway area had become the location of numerous wartime industrial sites with approximately 4,000 temporary wartime housing units.

During World War II, areas along the Pacific Highway were used for numerous wartime factories. Gunnery installations were located in the area and the top of the Convair Plant site was camouflaged to look like a nursery similar to the farming operations in Mission Valley. At that time, names associated with World War II such as Midway, Nimitz and Frontier (Sports Arena Boulevard) appeared as street names throughout the area.

In the 1950s, the Pacific Highway area was the location of some of the aircraft industry associated with Lindbergh Field, as well as numerous other warehouses and industrial-related operations. During this time the central Midway area continued to develop with small warehouses and commercial developments along Midway Drive and Rosecrans Street.

By the 1960s, the Midway area was a mixture of industrial and commercial operations. Problems with traffic congestion, signage and overhead utility lines were evident throughout the community. Today, most of the government wartime housing has been replaced by a variety of commercial land uses. Light industrial land uses have remained along the fringe of the Midway commercial core and are interspersed with commercial development along most of the Pacific Highway Corridor.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Prior to the 1930s, little development occurred in the marshy salt flats of the Midway area which were historically a low-lying river drainage. The existing land use pattern in the Midway central core first emerged with the construction of major streets such as Barnett Avenue, Midway Drive, Rosecrans Street and Frontier Drive (Sports Arena Boulevard). Some of the first permanent structures in the community appeared in the 1950s, when the triangular shaped piece of land located at the Rosecrans, Camino del Rio, I-5 intersection was subdivided and developed with a number of small-scale commercial and industrial buildings with attached storage yards.

In the 1950s, several of the large parcels of land formerly used for government wartime housing were purchased by the City of San Diego and later sold and/or developed with various commercial uses along Midway Drive, Frontier Drive (Sports Arena Boulevard) and Rosecrans Street. Because much of the community's existing development occurred after the evolution of the street pattern, most development projects in this community have had an historical reliance on an automobile-oriented system of site design and layout. Midway contains many freestanding commercial structures surrounded by large parking lots, which is a common suburban design response to consumer reliance on the automobile.

Although Midway was once considered almost exclusively as an industrial area, rising land values have caused a shift from industrial activity to commercial. Today, most of the industrial land has been encroached upon by commercial uses with only the Kurtz Street/Camino del Rio area and the Pacific Highway Corridor left as industrial districts.

Since the 1960s, the community has continuously suffered from haphazard development, which has resulted in the lack of a clear visual form—both in terms of orientation and community legibility. Fragmented zoning patterns have promoted freestanding and isolated “island-type” commercial projects. The resulting wide diversity in development patterns, architectural styles, setbacks and other development criteria has contributed to a disjointed and sporadic community image, where few buildings have compatibility or any functional relationship to each other and the surrounding neighborhood. Important public facilities in the community have tended to rely on size, rather than character, for public recognition. Due to the area’s historically low land valuations, high traffic utilization and inadequate zoning and development regulation, many auto-oriented commercial uses have located throughout the industrially zoned portions of the community. Much of the commercial development built in accordance with the now-rescinded Midway Planned District Ordinance, including auto-oriented commercial uses, adult entertainment and drive-through restaurants, now exhibit a general lack of adequate parking, landscaping and other commercial development amenities.

Although the 1991 Midway/Pacific Highway Corridor Community Plan recommended the redesignation and rezoning of properties in an attempt to consolidate land uses, and further recommended design standards to address the problems identified above, the community has continued to suffer from the effects of past development in the community. The existing parcel sizes and configurations, as well as the degree of economic dislocation resulting from the variety of uses in the community that are mixed in an undesirable manner, have acted as impediments to redevelopment and revitalization. These factors, in addition to the anticipated economic impacts resulting from closure of the Naval Training Center, have served as the basis for the establishment of a redevelopment project which includes much of the community.

